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5 October 1978

MEMORANDUM FOR: Mr. Thomas Thornton
NSC Staff Member

FROM : [REDACTED]
NFAC/ORPA/[REDACTED]

SUBJECT : Chief Chirau's Position

Chief Jeremiah Chirau has the least support of any of the black Rhodesian leaders who have been involved in the settlement process, largely because he owes his political position almost entirely to Prime Minister Smith. In December, 1976, Chirau and fellow Chief Kayisa Ndiweni announced the formation of the Zimbabwe United People's Organization. It appears almost certain that Smith's white minority regime encouraged the creation of ZUPO, and has since given financial support to the organization. Although Chirau is now an equal partner with Smith, Bishop Abel Muzorewa and Ndabaningi Sithole in the biracial transitional government's Executive Council, ZUPO has not developed any mass black following in Rhodesia.

Chirau's family had a traditional claim to leadership in a tribal area near Salisbury, but it was the white regime that appointed him chief of his district in 1961 as part of its general policy of making chiefs well-paid civil servants and appointing them to direct local administration in the Tribal Trust Lands alongside white District Commissioners. Chirau, who later became one of 10 black senators in the Rhodesian parliament and a minister in Smith's cabinet, has consistently followed a conservative political line and supported Smith's policies.

Smith sought to include Chirau in the settlement process because of his value as a reliable black ally to counter the more militant nationalists. Smith apparently has used Chirau as an intermediary with nationalists leaders. When the Prime Minister was trying to arrange a meeting with Joshua Nkomo last summer, Chirau met with Nkomo in London and sounded out the ZAPU leader about a settlement.

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Smith may also have encouraged Chirau's recent public statements supporting the proposed all-parties meeting on Rhodesia. Smith himself has taken a somewhat more negative position concerning the meeting as part of his effort to mollify white opinion after ZAPU forces shot down a Rhodesian airliner last month. The Prime Minister is still interested in negotiations, and he may have wanted to use Chirau to signal that he is keeping the door open for future talks.

Although Chirau's lack of black support makes it unlikely that he will play a significant role after a settlement, he may have some relevance in connection with further negotiations. Despite the Patriotic Front's characterization of ZUPU as a puppet of the Rhodesian whites, Chirau is treated respectfully by almost all of the nationalist leaders. Nkomo's willingness to meet with Chirau suggests that the Chief might again serve as an intermediary for Smith.

During the negotiations leading up to the Salisbury agreement last March, Chirau tried to mediate between Smith and Muzorewa on sticky issues. Although the declining fortunes of the transitional government have led to increased tensions between Smith and his black colleagues, both Smith and Chirau want to keep the internal settlement alive. If Muzorewa and/or Sithole show signs of wavering in their commitment to the settlement, Chirau probably would use what influence he has to persuade them to remain in the government.



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